



# THE DIVINITY STAFF AT GLASGOW UNIVERSITY IN 1903

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By the passing of the Rev. T. H. Weir, D.D., on 5th May 1928, the last link with the Divinity Hall of our youth is severed for some of us. When I entered the Hall the Professors were William Hastie, William Stewart, James Robertson, and James Cooper, with Thomas H. Weir acting as Assistant in the Oriental Languages Department. All of them were men of character, who each left his peculiar impress upon us; and, looking back across the years, one can visualise each of them in his own classroom with perfect vividness.

## I

Hastie, with his bluish-grey beard and his blue spectacles, was regarded by us as an extraordinary person. He was supposed to introduce us to the elements of theology, but, as most of us were new to the technicalities of the subject, we could only listen in amazement, for the first few weeks, to this human encyclopædia pouring forth his voluminous knowledge of philosophy, science, art, literature, and theology—for he was at home and at ease in all these departments—in one unbroken stream. As he took his place on the rostrum he would lay down his lecture notes on the desk and adhere to them conscientiously for a few minutes. Then the mention of a name, or a book, or a theory, would set him off impromptu; and, swinging his leg over the arm of his chair, and gazing into space through his blue spectacles, he would launch into a prelection of the most brilliant description, and only become conscious of time when the big bell above us boomed out the hour, followed by the tinkle of the little bell clamourously calling us to another class. The result was that it was difficult for him to set the orthodox examination paper, since he could never recall the ground he had covered. For the same reason, he never expected us to reproduce his lectures verbatim in our answers. But he invariably gave us credit for any signs of personal reading on the subject.

He was altogether unique. His interests were universal. At this

time he was busy "sonneteering" in his leisure moments, and "poeticising," after the style of Fitzgerald, in Persian poetry, the results of which appeared in *The Glory of Nature in the Land of Lorn—a Sonnet Sequence* (Edinburgh, 1903); and *The Festival of Spring, from the Divan of Jélâleddin*, with a criticism of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyâm (Glasgow, 1903). He was not a great poet, any more than Professor Cooper who, in his latter days, also attempted the sonnet form in *Sonnets on Scottish Cathedrals and Universities* (Glasgow, 1911). But the ambition indicated that they were both men of imagination and ideals.

Dr Hastie had rather an unusual and, in some ways, unfortunate career, before he finally found his true sphere in the Glasgow Chair of Theology (founded in 1640) in succession to Purdie Dickson and John Caird. Dr Donald Macmillan has set down with great fulness an account of Hastie's chequered experiences in *The Life of Professor Hastie* (Paisley, 1926), which is at times unnecessarily polemical, defensive, and diffuse. I question if Hastie would have quite approved of the exaggerated attention devoted to a solitary episode of his life while acting as Principal of the Church of Scotland College at Calcutta. Undoubtedly it inflicted a deep wound on the proud and sensitive soul of Hastie; but Time had healed it; and, in the happiness he enjoyed in his later years as Professor, it faded into a mere unpleasant memory.

Born at Wanlockhead on 7th July 1842, he graduated B.D. at Edinburgh in 1869, and, after various assistantships, was ordained for Calcutta in 1878. Returning home in 1884, he supported himself for some years by literary work, chiefly translations from German, Italian, and French. He was Croall Lecturer in 1892 (*The Theology of the Reformed Church in its Fundamental Principles*, published after his death in 1904); received his D.D. from Edinburgh University in 1894, and was appointed to Glasgow in October 1895. He was regarded as one of the most learned men in Great Britain. He was a profound scholar and linguist, and an eloquent preacher. In the absence of Professors, he taught various classes in the Faculties of Divinity and Law, and he had also an intimate knowledge of Medicine and Physiology.

A Lectureship was founded in his memory in Glasgow University; and among his students a Hastie Club was formed shortly after his death, which still meets annually at Assembly time. An exhaustive bibliography of his publications in philosophy and theology appears in the last volume of the revised edition of Scott's *Fasti*, and also in an appendix to Dr Macmillan's biography.

He died suddenly at Edinburgh on 31st August 1903, to the grief of all of us; and during the interregnum till the appointment of his successor, Professor H. M. B. Reid, we had lectures on "The Doctrine of Sin" from William Fulton, who is now the occupant of Hastie's Chair.

These lectures in their precision and orderliness were in striking contrast to Hastie's ; but it is surely a testimony to their quality that one should be able, after this long lapse of years, even to recall the subject of them.

## II

Professor Reid was admitted to the Chair on 19th November 1903, in virtue of the appearance he made at the open competition for the Divinity Professorship at Aberdeen—a competition which, incidentally, has been the means of discovering quite a number of present Professors. He was familiar with all the orthodox text-books on the subject—witness his *Text-Book of Dogmatics* (London, 1919)—and was very detailed and painstaking in his endeavours to impart a working knowledge of the science. He brought with him to the college certain traditions of the St Andrew's School, where, a quarter of a century before, he had been trained under Principal Tulloch ; and we were rather amused at, and probably a little contemptuous of, his rather magisterial and pedagogic manner and methods. Yet he was desperately in earnest and well-intentioned, and eager to be friendly. But to the end of our course he was still experimenting, and never exactly “found himself” in our presence. Nevertheless, his affection for his first-students persisted to the end of his days ; and some of us, in later years, were rather shamed by his genuine manifestations of interest in our ministerial careers. It seemed like heaping coals of fire on our heads when we remembered our wayward extravagances of behaviour in his classroom, and our rather hoydenish teasing of a man who was doing the best for us that he knew.

He was a prolific book-producer from the days of his ministry at Balmaghie till the time of his death. He was a Glasgow man, born 22nd March 1856, son of Rev. Alexander F. Reid, Chaplain to H.M. Prison. Educated at Dundee, and at St Andrew's University, his first publication was *Songs for the Use of St Andrew's Students*, three of which, from his own pen, were included in the *Scottish Students' Song Book*. At St Andrews, too, he must have imbibed some of the spirit of Samuel Rutherford, for, to the end of his days, he remained a violent Presbyterian of the old school, fanatical in his opposition to Popery, Anglicanism, and every form of so-called “High Church” practices. In one of his letters he writes : “ ‘Next Sunday being Palm Sunday’—so I heard among the intimations last Lord's Day!—‘there will be service daily during Holy Week,’ came next. Then two services on Good Friday, and Holy Communion on Easter Day. Meantime, a starved curate looks round the corner with hungry hopefulness. The fat Rector of St Aloysius rubs his hands, and J.S.P. adds his enigmatic smile.”



In his correspondence he revealed the same quixotic flashes that characterised his brilliant monologues—for his talks with us in private could seldom be described as conversations. Here is another example of his antipathy to Catholic practices: "All I can say is '*Festina Lente*'—don't fuss about Lent!"

His mother was the daughter of a Wesleyan minister, and it may be that the strong Puritanic strain in his disposition was inherited. At least, Professor Cooper, his very antithesis in the matter of Ecclesiastics, seemed to suggest that he himself owed something to heredity for his Catholic outlook, for he records proudly that "through his grandmother he was descended from Alexander Gaderer, minister of Girvan, brother of Bishop Gaderer." Who can tell to what remote ancestor we owe our idiosyncrasies?

Professor Reid's list of publications is a long one. For the most part they are in essay, or biographic form, in which he showed great skill, especially in his later volumes: *The Divinity Principals of the University of Glasgow* (1917) and *The Divinity Professors of the University of Glasgow* (1923).

He demitted his Chair in 1927, and died at Glasgow on 18th October of the same year. He was buried at Balmaghie, beside his beloved "Kirk above Dee Water" which he loved to write about, and where he spent perhaps the twenty-one happiest years of his life.

### III

With Professor Stewart we took no liberties. He was Clerk of the Senate as well as Professor of Biblical Criticism—*i.e.* New Testament Theology; and his distant manner inspired in our hearts a kind of awe, closely akin to fear, for this little man who gave us the impression that he was almost too busy with other matters to be bothered with us. We were probably wrong in our impressions. Looking back now, one imagines that the explanation of his brusque manner was his innate shyness. For, when circumstances necessitated a personal interview in his retiring-room, he was both courteous and kind.

His voice had a pronounced nasal accent which seemed to lend a peculiar emphasis to his diction; and, at times, when he varied his lectures on Griesbach with an address on the Holy Land (which we maliciously agreed had originally been prepared for pulpit purposes), he would rise into exalted flights of eloquence and picturesque rhetoric, which called forth our ecstatic, if perhaps slightly ironical, cheers. This was the only opportunity ever permitted to us in his class of giving vent to our suppressed emotions. Yet we cherished for him a real feeling of respect; and it was admiration for his self-denying labours for the University, as much as for his old-fashioned lectures, that called forth from

his old students the bronze plaque that now adorns the wall of his classroom.

His life was devoted to business and administrative work. His one published volume, *The Plan of St Luke's Gospel*, appeared in 1873, the year in which he was appointed to the Chair of Biblical Criticism. Before that, he was minister of St George's-in-the-Field Parish, Glasgow, for five years. He was a native of Galloway, born 15th August 1835, educated at Dalbeattie and Glasgow University, where he graduated B.A. (1861), M.A. (1862), and B.D. (1867). In 1864-6 he taught the Moral Philosophy class during the illness of Professor Fleming, and at the age of thirty-nine received the D.D. from Glasgow. He resigned his office in 1910, and died at Glasgow on 11th September 1919.

The reticence I spoke of reveals itself even in Scott's *Fasti*, where it is recorded that he had issue—three sons. No names are given; so that we have to discover elsewhere that one of his sons is A. W. Stewart, Professor of Chemistry in Queen's University, Belfast, who also apparently dislikes publicity. In the intervals of winning fame for his recognition of the existence of the isobaric atom and opening up fresh fields in spectroscopy, Mr Stewart is rapidly making a great reputation as a writer of successful detective novels, concealing his identity under the pseudonym of "J. J. Connington."

#### IV

Professor Robertson is difficult to delineate. He was so human, so genial, so unaffected, so sincere. He had never any trouble keeping order in the Hebrew classroom. His opening devotions in the morning were no routine exercise, but were the expressions of a truly devout heart finding its vocabulary naturally in the dignified language of his beloved Psalter. One sometimes felt that he would have liked to pray in Hebrew. "As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon Thee, O Lord, until that Thou have mercy upon us." One can hear that quiet voice of his still, invoking the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob with all the fervour of a patriarch.

There was a kind of compelling moral atmosphere in his classroom. Hebrew wearied some of us, yet he never got impatient with our negligence. He would invite one to his room, and, at the resulting interview, begin to talk in the most friendly fashion about one's work in the Union, or for the Missionary Society. He would inquire if one was doing much preaching on Sundays, and become solicitous as a father about the dangers of over-working, and suggest that one probably had not so much time for class-preparation as one would desire. It was beautifully done; and

the effect of such conversations upon even the most callous was devastating. One felt in honour bound thenceforth to find time to do a little more work for this profoundly understanding "Rabbi."

In general criticism—particularly on the Prophets—on which he used to lecture at a second hour on certain days, attendance being optional, he was entrancing. Bible manners and customs he could illumine by a simple Eastern gesture, or a characteristic shrug of the shoulders. His knowledge of the Orient, derived from personal experience, was vast; his scholarship erudite and exact. His love for the Old Testament amounted to a passion; and when he pled with us to endeavour in our ministry to keep up our Hebrew by reading *at least our Sunday pulpit lessons* in the original, we were so affected by his eagerness, and by the modesty and reasonableness of the demand, that we wanted to give him an audible assent. But it is as well, perhaps, for the consciences of some of us that the promise was not exacted. Our intentions were good, and our love of the old man undoubted. But the work of the ministry has many distractions, and the dust lies deep on the top of many Hebrew Bibles that, through the medium of the old "Rabbi," were presented to us by the British and Foreign Bible Society.

Born at Alyth, 2nd March 1840, he graduated in Arts at Aberdeen, and took his Divinity Course at St Andrews. He was ordained as missionary to the Church of Scotland in Constantinople in his twenty-second year, and spent several profitable years between Constantinople and Beyrout. Returning to Scotland, he was elected minister of Mayfield Church, Edinburgh, in 1875; and was appointed to the Hebrew Chair in 1877. He resigned in 1907, and died at Edinburgh 23rd December 1920.

His books are few; but, like the man himself, are sound, solid, and sincere. *The Early Religion of Israel* (Baird Lecture, Edinburgh, 1892) and *The Religion and Poetry of the Psalms* (Croall Lecture, Edinburgh, 1898) will still repay perusal, despite the modern advances in critical scholarship. Like old Rabbi Duncan he was open-minded, but cautious, like every true Scot. Indeed, his attitude to scholarship might appropriately be summed up in the words of advice written by Professor Duncan to one of his students: "Our theology, always based on, and ever directly recurring for its proof, to Holy Scripture, has, as a developed system, a venerable back-leaning on the whole history of theology in the Christian Church from the beginning. Hence it embraces Athanasianism as to the Trinity and Person of Christ, Augustinianism as to the nature of saving grace, Calvinism as against Lutheranism and Zwinglianism, and, still more decidedly, as against Arminianism. It radicates deeply in Patristics, the massive theology of the Reformers, the developments of the post-Reformation schools of the Dutch and French divines, the sturdy Anglican bottom of solid learning, manly thinking, practical good sense and decided piety



of the Puritans, the lucid metaphysics of the New Englanders, with that peculiar ardour, the *perfervidum ingenium* which distinguishes the older divines of our own Church, the Rutherfords, Grays, Dicksons, etc." It was on such solid foundations that Professors Hastie and Reid also envisaged the rising of a new Scottish School of Theology. It is possible that it may yet be realised as part and parcel of the new Scottish Renaissance which is manifesting itself in other departments of Life and Letters.

On the occasion of his eightieth birthday in 1920, Professor Robertson was made the recipient of a unique souvenir in the form of a volume prepared by seven members of the Glasgow University Oriental Society. It is entitled *Studia Semitica et Orientalia*, and contains as an Appendix a complete Bibliography of Dr Robertson's published writings both in book and magazine form.

I still treasure certain letters which I received from him after he had retired to Edinburgh where, in summer-time, he said, "he had more trouble with dandelion roots in a new garden than ever he had with Hebrew roots." In another he writes after a visit to Dunblane: "Leighton's Sermons and Commentary on 1 Peter are old friends of mine. Principal Tulloch recommended them to his students, and in my young ministerial days they were constantly beside me. No better things could be recommended to young ministers. You try Leighton. In a time of sturt and strife, he lived at peace with all men, because he continually breathed the air of heaven. But for the 'thrawnness' of the men of his time, he would have changed the whole tone of the history of the Scottish Church."

## V

This reference to Church Union brings us naturally to Professor Cooper. His churchmanship, his zeal for a comprehensive union of the churches, his assiduity, his conscientiousness are all set forth in Dr Wotherspoon's appreciative biography—*James Cooper, A Memoir* (London, 1926). But the Cooper we knew was an even more interesting and many-sided personality than the Cooper Dr Wotherspoon portrays. He was a "character," almost a curiosity, who intrigued us from the moment of our first acquaintance. We honoured him and teased him; we laughed at him and loved him; sang hymns with him on saints' days with gusto, and on festal occasions dined with him with equal gusto. There was about him a flavour of the Middle Ages—a piety, prayerful and profound, and a humour that was human and, at times, hilarious. One of his students in a surreptitious "class-exercise" caught one aspect of him:

"Last of the Mediævalists, he  
Stands clothed in sweet humility.



Visions of far-off Paradise  
 Gleam in his half-oped, upturned eyes ;  
 Pathos sublime and every grace  
 And virtue shine from out his face,  
 Clean-shaven all, with, here and there,  
 Deep furrows marked by constant prayer,  
 And piety, devout and rare.  
 A celibate in him you see,  
 Deckt with a little skull-cap. He  
 Explains 'tis but to warm his head,  
 Tonsured by nature it is said.  
 No Saints' Day does he fail to keep,  
 No martyr long since fallen asleep  
 But St Jacobus sings his praise,  
 Lamenting these degenerate days  
 Wherein no martyrs are, at all,  
 And students are not punctual."

That was in 1903. But to the delight and surprise of us all, he married, in 1912, Miss Margaret Williamson of Shempston, Morayshire.

As a host, he was perfect. At a Christmas dinner he was in his element, making fun of each of his students present with discriminating geniality, and quoting Scott's poetry by the canto with boyish delight. Jovial in his off-hours as a monk of old, he was at the same time ever the teacher, and his casual allusions to books or sermons, or subjects liturgical or historical, suggested many fruitful lines of thought and study, and have probably influenced some of us more than all his more formal lectures on the saints and sinners of history. Many of us have forgotten his theories of history, or whether he had any ; but we have remembered his quaint, yet sage, advice about the etiquette of pastoral visitation, or about the celebration of the Sacraments.

Born at Elgin on 13th February 1846, he died there on 27th December 1922. His first charge was at St Stephen's, Broughty Ferry (1873). In 1881 he was translated to Aberdeen, East Parish, where his pastoral zeal is remembered to this day. In 1886 he founded the Aberdeen Ecclesiological Society, incorporated, with the societies of Glasgow and Edinburgh, in the Scottish Ecclesiological Society in 1903. He came to Glasgow University in 1898, and resigned three months before his death.

His advocacy of a wider union with the Reformed Churches won him many friendships in England and abroad. Durham, Dublin, Oxford, Glasgow, Aberdeen, all honoured him with honorary degrees, and the summit of his ambition was achieved when he was appointed Moderator of the General Assembly in 1917. He published many works on Ecclesiology and Liturgiology. But his most characteristic writings are his sermons, especially those on special occasions, the best of which are

gathered together in *Kindness to the Dead* (London, 1924). His attitude to Church Union is fully expressed in *Re-Union, a Voice from Scotland* (London, 1918). Lord Sands was re-echoing it the other day at the Church Congress at Cheltenham ; and the reception of his remarks shows that Cooper was far in advance of Scottish public opinion even as it is to-day. But he "blazed the trail."

## VI

And, finally, there was (afterwards Dr) Thomas H. Weir whom, in those days, we referred to affectionately as "Tommy" Weir. His quiet, hesitating, bashful method of lecturing took us by surprise at first, and made us rather sorry for him. He gave us the impression that if we were not careful we might frighten him off the rostrum. But we got to understand him, and appreciate him, too, as one of the ablest Oriental scholars in the world. We began to realise in time that he knew so much about Hebrew and Arabic and Sanskrit, and also about New Testament Literature—indeed, about all aspects of Biblical scholarship—and were so impressed by his weight of learning, borne with such retiring modesty, that we felt it was hardly worth our while bothering about these things, since we had always him to refer to in questions of difficulty. He reminded one, in some respects, of "Danny" Rankin who used to assist Professor Ramsay in Latin. They were both supreme scholars whom we admired without envy, as men who had made the most of their talents, and had justified their existence in the sphere of learning. And they were both so utterly obliging, and willing to help by putting all their stores of knowledge at the disposal of the veriest tyro !

Dr Weir was born in the Old College, Glasgow, where his father, Rev. Duncan Harkness Weir, was Professor of Oriental Languages (1850-77). He graduated in Arts and Divinity at Glasgow, and began his Semitic Studies under Dr Robertson, his father's successor. He tried preaching for two years, then teaching in Australia for another two. But he found his real niche when the University Court appointed him Assistant to Prof. Robertson in 1893. He subsequently received the status of Lecturer on Hebrew ; and, in 1902, that of Lecturer in Arabic Language and Literature. In 1924 Aberdeen University conferred on him the honorary degree of D.D. He travelled extensively in Northern Africa and Palestine, and the fruits of his erudition and experience were published in various books. These include : *A Short History of the Hebrew Text of the Old Testament* (1899) ; *The Sheikhs of Morocco in the Sixteenth Century* (1904) ; *The Variants in the Gospel Reports* (1920)—the Alexander Robertson Lecture for 1917 ; and *Omar Khayyám, the Poet*, a verse translation with introduction and commentary (1926).

And now "Tommy" is dead, too; with all the others. But, of a truth, they were a noble sextet. Two of them have received biographic memorials—Cooper and Hastie. All of them were worthy of similar monuments. And yet there was something about them that no biography could adequately render—the atmosphere created by their personalities, and the lasting influence of the impact of their personalities on the lives of the numerous students who passed through their classes—an influence which, consciously or unconsciously, shaped us and moulded us in our impressionable years, and played no small part in making us such men as we are to-day.



